

**REMARKS OF
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There is another Marine here this morning that I do not think got proper recognition; you may or may not know that Dr. Jack Hawkins, was a Marine Officer in Vietnam, combat awarded and was of our true heroes and sir, thank you for what you done for our Corps but also what you've done for America's youth.

[Applause]

Well, good morning ladies and gentlemen, it's great to be with you here this morning, with people who share my appreciation for sweet tea and corn-bread, on what is a very special day for us all. The Chancellor told you what the Commandant is - let me tell you what the Commandant does. My job is to recruit, train, and equip about 225,000 hard-charging Marines; the other part of my job is to serve as one of six members of the Joint Chief of Staff who offer best military advice to our national military command authorities.

Folks, my experiences have been that people do not remember who was the guest speaker at their graduation, and will remember for even a shorter period of time what he or she had to say. So, I'm going to be necessarily brief today with my comments. But I would like to offer just a few thoughts for the graduates — brief messages, if you will, on life.

First, you should be extremely proud of yourself as graduates from Troy University. You've already demonstrated some of those great American southern values like straight talk and common sense – but you've also exhibited intelligence, good judgment, and persistence. Otherwise, you wouldn't be sitting here today.

Some of you may be saying to yourself, “okay, I did good. This is a proud day. I have arrived.” Young people, enjoy the day — you certainly have earned it. But tomorrow, as they say, is the first day of the rest of your life. And I would offer to you, that perhaps you haven't arrived, perhaps you've just started — because questions abound: “What am I going to do? Where am I going to go? How much money am I going to make?”

Well, ladies and gentlemen, the answers are — like so many other things in life — “it depends.” Today, you join 18 percent of your fellow Americans who hold college degrees. Your degree and your status as a Troy graduate will do the same thing that a degree from Harvard or Duke or Southeast Missouri will do for others. It will get your foot in the door. *After that, it will be performance that counts.*

You know, one of the great things about this wonderful country of ours is that it is a democracy. But it is also a meritocracy. How much you produce, how novel your ideas, and how

well you motivate those who work for you, are going to be those things that your boss is looking for. And those qualities will immediately trump how tall you are, how handsome or pretty you may be, or where you came from. But as this school unleashes yet another graduating class on the world, be confident that wherever you go, and whatever you do, the lessons that are learned here — socially, educationally, professionally — will keep you in good stead.

As I referenced earlier, as a college graduate, you will most certainly have people in your charge. And I ensure you leadership will be a major factor in your success.

I don't believe, as a general rule, that colleges and universities do a very good job teaching leadership. It is both art and science, and clearly it is a developed skill. You can read about leadership in biographies. You hopefully see it exhibited, in your daily lives. And I suspect that many of you have probably exercised your leadership in organizations here at the University or in the community. Let me offer to you, if I can though, just three little pearls of wisdom from the Marine Corps book on leadership.

First, expect the unexpected. Graduates, I know you've been counseled that you need to establish your goals and ambitions in life, and then map out a plan for yourself on how you're going to get there. What I want to alert you to, about your plan, is that if something can go wrong, it will. In the Marine Corps, we say that "few plans survive first contact with the enemy." The question is, when that happens to you – what are you going to do about it?

What a good leader does is maintain momentum along the path that he or she has chosen. To do that, you build flexibility into your plan, you "expect the unexpected" and think through what you might do when things go awry. A good leader creates options to his plan, and has several decision points along the way. At those decision points, evaluate, and be ready to adjust if your plan isn't working. Most important, however, is to enjoy yourself in the process. All of us struggle sooner or later, but invariably it's the optimist – the person who sees opportunity in adversity – that is that first to emerge from the swamp. Life is all too short for you to do otherwise.

Second, in the absence of orders — attack! By that, I mean: be bold and daring. Where you have the latitude to make decisions, take it to the firewall. Be aggressive, but be smart. Understand that there may be risks associated with aggressive courses of action, but you should work to mitigate those risks, not shrink from them. Others may find it more comforting to await instruction or be sure that they got the right direction, but our society rewards initiative. We teach our Marine lieutenants that it's far better to have to ask forgiveness for having gone to far – than to ask permission to get started.

And third, officers eat last. In our Corps, field rations are issued in a little sealed plastic bag. They are first cooked and then dehydrated. That gets pretty old, pretty fast. Occasionally, we'll have hot chow brought in from the mess deck either in a field or a combat situation. When we do, out of pure respect for those young Marines who are doing the most fighting and the hardest work, officers eat only after all the troops have been served. Many times when the Company Gunny has failed to bring enough chow to the field or the lads were just hungry, my officers and I would have a cup of coffee and a few scraps of bread. But you know, I wouldn't change a thing.

In your leadership role, I offer to you the symbology: eat last. Take care of those who work for you to the absolute best of your ability. Never ask them to do something that you wouldn't be more than willing to do yourself. And if the job is especially difficult, lead them through it with your own very positive example. Take my word for it. The result will be a fierce loyalty to you and what you stand for, as well as the belief that together you can accomplish anything.

There is a quote out there by Teddy Roosevelt, a truly great American that I've admired for years, and I think that it eloquently summarizes the characteristics of a true leader, he said:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

Graduates, perhaps for the fifth year in a row now, you join the workforce, of a Nation at war. I have an uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach that our American public does not fully understand the nature of the fight that we're engaged in. I don't think that we as a military or for that matter, the federal government have properly explained the real danger that exists. We're at war with a growing movement of religious extremism. Whether or not we want to accept it, Afghanistan and Iraq are the first battles of that war. If you win the first battles, the war gets shorter. If you lose those first battles, the war is only longer and tougher to win.

If it's true that our Nation doesn't think that the war in Iraq is part of the war on terrorism, it doesn't matter, because the enemy does. If we as a people think that we can simply walk away — like we did in Vietnam or Somalia — without impact, the enemy doesn't believe that at all. He attacked us first, and he has said openly that he will attack us again and again until we are exhausted and bankrupt.

In 2001, our Nation — was attacked by irrational people who had taken advantage of our free and open society and, in the aggregate, they killed over 3,000 of our countrymen. I'm convinced they killed 3,000 — because they couldn't kill 30,000 or even three million, because they hadn't developed the means to do so. But let me tell you, ladies and gentlemen, these people hate you with a seething passion. They don't know you, but they blame you for their own shortcomings in their own society. I assure you, if they could come into your house tonight, they would slaughter every man, woman, and child and not suffer an ounce of remorse.

But you folks don't have to worry about that, because standing between you and them are the Armed Forces of the United States. Our strategy has always been to engage as far from our shores as we can — and indeed, that is what's happening right now. If you talk to those great young Marines and soldiers, sailors and airmen out there, they would tell you that the reason why our country hasn't been attacked since 2001, has got to do with the fact that those people who

would otherwise be trying to come into New York or Los Angeles, are finding their ways to Iraq; or to Afghanistan — and our people are taking them on there. We have lost people – and others will die; but that’s the nature of a war. Many more of them will be killed and are being killed. Let me assure you that our troops are quite proud of the fact that they are protecting this great country from where they are right now, in positions forward based, while we carry on this ceremony in peace and security.

This is a great young generation of Americans out there who are more than willing and capable to take the fight to the enemy. Old guys like me underestimated them once. We call them the “joystick generation,” and thought that they were maybe soft or had a lack of discipline, not enough team sports or outdoor activity. We were concerned that they might not make good Service men and women.

Ladies and gentlemen, we could not have been more wrong! I’ve seen those young people in combat; their raw courage, selflessness, and team play will bring tears to your eyes. They are good, and they get it, and they are making a difference. I suggest to you that my Service, indeed our nation, is in great shape for a long time to come as these young men and women continue to reach increasing levels of responsibility.

[Applause]

Graduates, families, loved ones, college faculty; I will close by asking you to do just a few things. *One is to develop a more complete understanding of the threat that we face.* It is real. It is sinister, and if not defeated, threatens to change the world as we know it. Cast your net broadly, beyond our own media, to gain awareness. Be part of the debate, and if you have the opportunity, talk to the Marines and soldiers who have been there.

The second thing is, please continue to support the troops. These brave young men and women deserve your support. In a nation of now over 300 million, only 2.5 million wear the uniforms of the United States military. They have stepped forward to defend our Nation at a crucial time in our history. During Vietnam, when many of our countrymen didn’t agree with the government’s policy, they unfortunately painted everybody with the same brush, and treated our men and women in uniform shamefully. I believe our Nation has now matured a great deal since then, and now you can disagree with the policy if you must, but still support the troops. I ask you to do so. Keep them in your prayers, keep them in your thoughts and nurture their families if they are wounded, and insist that they have the best gear available to accomplish the mission and come home safely.

Finally graduates, this is your day. But you did not get here by yourself. At some point today you need to turn to that person, or those people, closest to you. Look them in the eye, give them a hug, and just say thanks. College graduation is a team effort and congratulations to each and every one of you for the effort you have put into it.

God bless you all – and may God bless America!

[Applause]